

*Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2017*

**Remarks at a Briefing on Hurricane Maria Relief Efforts at Luis Muñiz Air National Guard Base, Puerto Rico**

*October 3, 2017*

*The President.* Well, thank you very much. It's a—it was a great trip and a beautiful place. I've been to Puerto Rico many times as, I think, most of you have known. And I've always loved it. And your weather is second to none, but every once in a while you get hit. And you really got hit, there's no question about it.

I want to thank, in particular, some of the folks that have come here where really great danger was involved, right at the beginning. I have to start with Brock. Where's Brock? Brock—Brock Long has been through a lot. We gave him an A-plus in Texas. We thought he could rest for a couple of days, but before he got any rest, he had Florida, right? And you had Louisiana, and you had other places. And by the way, Louisiana—we don't say it often, but Louisiana got hit very hard also, and they've been fantastic. But then he came to Florida, and that we gave him another A-plus.

And then, all of a sudden, we said there's another one heading out to Puerto Rico and to the U.S. Virgin Islands. And—but it wasn't one, it was two. And I was going to be here a week ago, if you remember, and that was the day of the hurricane—that was the day of the second hurricane.

So Brock has been unbelievable. And this has been the toughest one. This has been a category 5, which few people have ever even heard of—a category 5 hitting land. But it hit land—and, boy, did it hit land.

So I want to thank you. I want to thank Elaine. Elaine, thank you very much. Fantastic—Acting Secretary. Elaine Duke has been incredible. Tom Bossert is here someplace. Tom, great job. Great job.

And to all of my people—and I have to say, General Buchanan got here a few days ago, and there's no doubt about it you are a general. There's a reason you're a general, right? But he's "no games." I said, give me a general; I don't want to have any—I don't want to have a general that plays games. And you've done a fantastic job. The whole team has been amazing.

Your Governor has been—who I didn't know; I heard very good things about him. He's not even from my party, and he started right at the beginning appreciating what we did. And he was tremendously supportive, and he knew the level of problem that you had at the beginning, before, and the level—what happened with respect to the tremendous storms that hit your beautiful island.

And, Governor, I just want to tell you that, right from the beginning, this Governor did not play politics. He didn't play it at all. He was saying it like it was, and he was giving us the highest grades. And I want to—on behalf of our country, I want to thank you.

*Governor Ricardo A. Rosselló Nevares of Puerto Rico.* Thank you so much.

*The President.* That was truly amazing.

I also want to thank your Congresswoman, who actually represents the largest number of people of any Congressperson in the United States. I know that. It's 3½ million people,

Jennifer, right? So Congresswoman Jennifer González-Colón, who I've watched the other day, and she was saying such nice things about all of the people that have worked so hard.

Jennifer, do you think you could say a little bit what you said about us today? And it's not about me, it's about these incredible people, from the military to FEMA to first responders. I mean, I've never seen people working so hard in my life. Perhaps you could say——

*Resident Commissioner Jennifer A. González-Colón.* Thank you, Mr. President.

*The President.* Congresswoman?

*Rep. González-Colón.* Thank you, Mr. President. The first thing is that, before we were hit by Maria, we were hit by Hurricane Irma. And during that time, before the hurricane, here was FEMA acting together with a lot of employees. More than 4,000 people were here in the island from the different branches of the military, HHS, Navy, Army, FEMA, and all the staff working together before the hurricane hit. They were here before, during, after the first hurricane, and they continued to stay on the island, boots on the ground. During Maria—same thing.

I think we never got the level of communication within the Federal Government and the local government like never before. And we are in the path of the hurricane, so we are used to receiving hurricanes, but never before a category 5. The amount of devastation—it's unheard of. But during all of this time, we got the Federal Government by our side, doing the job of the people here, like you in the military, doing all that has been asked. All the questions and requests that the Governor did, the President and his Cabinet accomplished it and send more people and has continued to send in more people, trucks, drivers, and resources.

Thank you, Mr. President, for all you've been doing for the island.

*The President.* Well, I want to thank you because you were really generous. And I saw those comments, and everybody saw those comments, and we really appreciate it.

And you know, it's so important, when you have men and women that have worked so hard and so long, and many of them came from two other catastrophic hurricanes. I mean, they came from Texas, they came from Louisiana, they came from Florida, and there was no—how many nights' rest have you gotten? Zero in the last month, right?

*Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator W. Brock Long.* This is day 43.

*The President.* Yes, all right. Well, we're going to keep him for another couple of weeks. And by that time, I think—well, we—come here. Special guy, I will tell you—special. Really good. Really great.

I also—in addition to Tom, I also want to thank Linda McMahon, Small Business. I always joke—I said, she's in charge of small business, but small business is massive business when you add it all up. And she has done an incredible job; built a great company with her husband Vince McMahon. And I wanted her so badly for this position, because there's nobody that knows how to build a company like those, and let me tell you, like this woman. She has been amazing in business, and now she's doing an incredible job as the Administrator. We want to thank you, Linda, very much.

And Mick Mulvaney is here—right there—and Mick is in charge of a thing called "budget." Now, I hate to tell you, Puerto Rico, but you've thrown our budget a little out of whack because we've spent a lot of money on Puerto Rico, and that's fine. We've saved a lot of lives.

If you look at the—every death is a horror. But if you look at a real catastrophe like Katrina, and you look at the tremendous hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people that died, and you look at what happened here with, really, a storm that was just totally overpowering—nobody has ever seen anything like this. What is your death count, as of this moment—17?

*Gov. Rosselló.* Sixteen certified.

*The President.* Sixteen people certified. Sixteen people versus in the thousands. You can be very proud of all of your people, all of our people working together. Sixteen versus literally thousands of people. You can be very proud. Everybody around this table, and everybody watching can really be very proud of what's taken place in Puerto Rico.

I also want to pay a very special thanks to the Navy. Who's here from the Navy? Who do we have, General——

*U.S. Navy Representative.* [Inaudible]—sir.

*The President.* Who do we have? What a job. So you have ships all over the place? I saw them flying in. I said, boy, this looks like very big stuff. And the job you've done getting things here. There are no docks. There have been—we're just in the process of opening them up. They were just devastated. But there are no docks, no nothing. And the way you got this stuff on shore is incredible.

So I want to thank the Navy. Would you like to say something on behalf of the Navy?

*USN Rep.* Sir, your Navy and Marine Corps team is here to respond, and Expeditionary Strike Group 2 was immediately deployed with four Navy ships to get here and handle anything that happened in Irma, and then immediately repositioned and was able to respond to Puerto Rico right after Maria.

So the Navy and Marine Corps team is happy to come here and save lives and coordinate with FEMA, with the Governor of Puerto Rico, and to demonstrate our ability to come from the sea, air, and land. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

*The President.* Well, thank you. And thank you very much. And I don't have to even mention the Marines because we have General Kelly. Where's General Kelly? Where is our General Kelly? He likes to keep a low profile. Look at him sitting in the back, but, boy, is he watching. You have no idea how he's—General Kelly, come up here. So General Kelly is a four-star. Not a bad general, right? You don't get any better than General Kelly.

But on behalf of the Marines, I'll tell you, they've done some job, General.

Now, can we also mention Army? And can we also mention some people that I really got to know and respect even more in Texas, and that's the Coast Guard?

*White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly.* Oorah.

*The President.* What a job the Coast Guard has done throughout this whole—[applause]—throughout this whole ordeal. I mean, they would go right into the middle of that—I mean, I don't know, I wouldn't want to be doing it, but I want to thank everybody. I want to thank the Coast Guard. They are special, special, very brave people.

And a lot of people got to see the real Coast Guard during this incredible trouble, and especially, I think, here and in Texas was incredible what they did. So thank you all very much. Thank you very much. We appreciate it. Really appreciate it.

Would you like to say something on behalf of your men and women?

*U.S. Air Force Representative.* Sir, I'm representing the Air Force.

*The President.* No, I know that.

*USAF Rep.* It's been a tremendous team effort partnering with FEMA and NORTHCOM, providing support, not only in CONUS, but also to the U.S. Virgin Islands and to Puerto Rico, specifically trying to open up the airfields so that we can get, as an island, get the majority of the supplies and—[inaudible]—with the people and personnel setting up across the island, so we can set up logistics networks so we could really get to those people that are the most hurt and devastated by the catastrophe.

*The President.* And the runways now are pretty open?

*USAF Rep.* Yes, sir. We have major—four major runways that are fully open and operational; flown about 700-plus strategic airlift sorties to and from the CONUS here on the island of Puerto Rico to provide life-sustaining support.

*The President.* Amazing job. Amazing job. So amazing that we're ordering hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of new airplanes for the Air Force, especially the F-35. Do you like the F-35?

*USAF Rep.* Sir, it's a game-changing technology, awesome airplane.

*The President.* I said, how does it do it in fights? And how do they do in fights with the F-35? They said, we do very well. You can't see it. You literally—you can't see it. So it's hard to fight a plane that you can't see, right?

*USAF Rep.* Sir, we like that. [Laughter]

*The President.* But that's an expensive plane that you can't see.

*USAF Rep.* Absolutely.

*The President.* And, as you probably heard, we cut the price very substantially, something that other administrations would never have done, that I can tell you. So thank you very much.

Where is the Coast Guard? Who can speak on behalf of the Coast Guard? Who can speak? Where is our Coast Guard representative?

*Participant.* Coast Guard officer right here.

*The President.* Come here, get over here.

*Participant.* Secretary Duke.

*The President.* Come here, come here, my man. On behalf of the Coast Guard, just say a few words. Your people have been amazing. Go ahead.

*U.S. Coast Guard Representative.* I don't think there's anything that the men and women of the Coast Guard would rather do than help the people of Puerto Rico, our fellow American citizens. For us, this is what we get to do on a daily basis. And getting to help our fellow citizens is just what our duty is all about. So it's our pleasure to be here, sir.

*The President.* Well, in Texas, it came in, it did devastation, then went right out into the coast, then it came in and out. It came in three times. It would load up with water and come in. Nobody has ever seen water like that.

And the Coast Guard would follow it. It goes in, and they'd be right behind it, and then they'd move. They saved 16,000 lives in Texas.

*USCG Rep.* Yes, sir.

*The President.* Sixteen—hard to believe—sixteen, between the helicopters and all of them. But the Coast Guard itself saved, in Texas, 16,000 lives, and they went right through that hurricane. And there aren't too many people who would have done it, believe me. Would you thank everybody for me?

*USCG Rep.* Yes, sir.

*The President.* Okay.

*USCG Rep.* Thank you very much, sir.

*The President.* Thank you.

*Participant.* Mr. President, we also have our Customs and Border Protection all setting up in here.

*The President.* Say a few words. Please, say a few words. Customs and Border Protection, say a few words, please. Don't be shy.

What I would like to do—you want to stand up? Go ahead. That's okay. Stand up. Go ahead.

*Participant.* [Inaudible]

*The President.* Okay.

*Participant.* [Inaudible]

*The President.* Okay. You did a great job. Senator, I just want to also add Rick Perry is here someplace. Rick—Governor of Texas for many years, 14 years—did a great job, head of Energy. And Scott Pruitt from Environmental is here and doing an amazing—really an amazing job. We appreciate it, fellas. Thank you very much.

Governor, would you say a few words?

*Gov. Rosselló.* Of course. Well, first of all, Mr. President, thank you for being here. Your presence over here with Cabinet members support the notion that we've been talking about: that this is a united effort. This is a united effort. We need to work together in order to overcome the many challenges that we have here in Puerto Rico.

I want to personally thank you, Mr. President, because over the course of the past week, you have called essentially every day to make sure that we have what we need, to make sure that the resources are over here.

And I want to let the people of Puerto Rico and the people of the United States know that you have always responded to us. And although this is big challenge, we are convinced that working together with our local government, FEMA, the Administrator, the DOD, and all of the assets we have here, it is a challenging time. We need to do more, but we will be able to build Puerto Rico stronger than ever before. That is our commitment.

I just wanted to let you know that right now, our forces are working so that they can deliver food, water to the people of Puerto Rico, so that diesel and fuel can get to the hospitals.

Now, it is a challenging time. It is a situation without precedent. But with strong leadership, with your continued support, Mr. President, with the continued support of everybody around this table, the mayors that have played a critical role in this development, our legislature that has been helpful, and all of the assets in Government—I can tell you, Mr. President, that we will not only come out of this, we will stabilize Puerto Rico, and we will build it stronger than ever.

Thank you so much.

*The President.* Thank you, Governor.

*Gov. Rosselló.* Thank you. God bless.

*The President.* Well, thank you, everybody. And we're going to make some tours now, if anybody has any questions or statements or anything. I know we have a lot of powerful people—a lot of your heads of your Senate, the heads of your everything. And it's an honor to work with you folks. And we'll all get it done together.

So I appreciate your support, and I know you appreciate our support, because our country has really gone all out to help. And it's not only dangerous, it's expensive, it's everything. But I consider it a great honor, maybe because I know so many people from Puerto Rico that are such great people—I come from New York. But we've gone all out, and I consider that, again, a great honor.

Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much, everybody. Okay. Thank you all. Let's go make a—let's go see what we have. Let's go.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:02 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Elaine C. Duke; Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Thomas P. Bossert; Lt. Gen. Jeffrey S. Buchanan, USA, commander, U.S. Army North (5th Army); and Office of Management and Budget Director John M. "Mick" Mulvaney.

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*Names:* Bossert, Thomas P.; Buchanan, Jeffrey S.; Duke, Elaine C.; González-Colón, Jenniffer A.; Kelly, John F.; Long, W. Brock; McMahon, Linda E.; McMahon, Vincent K.; Mulvaney, John M. "Mick"; Perry, J. Richard; Pruitt, E. Scott; Roselló Nevares, Ricardo A.

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